

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 584

CE 053 884

AUTHOR Shepherd, R.  
TITLE Beginning with the Learner: Strategies To Individualize Adult Literacy Programs.  
PUB DATE Jul 89  
NOTE 4p.; Paper presented at the Adult Literacy and Technology Conference (Louisville, KY, July 21-24, 1989).  
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; \*Adult Literacy; Basic Skills; Competency Based Education; \*Computer Assisted Instruction; Functional Literacy; \*High Risk Students; \*Individualized Instruction; \*Literacy Education; Success; Tutoring  
IDENTIFIERS Jackson State University MS

## ABSTRACT

The basis for all computer-assisted instruction at the Continuing Education Learning Center at Jackson State University is the instructional techniques necessary for the success of at-risk adult learners who find traditional methods inadequate. Each learner is pretested for reading level for placement, and skill assessments are made to diagnose specific weaknesses in content areas. Individualized competency-based education programs are designed to address content weaknesses that must be overcome if the learner is to succeed in the work force or the center's General Educational Development (GED) program. The computer-assisted instruction in these programs allows learners to learn at their own pace, helps make them accountable for their own learning, provides frequent feedback, and accommodates several learning styles. All of those aspects of instruction are needed by at-risk students. The center uses interactive and personal computers, video- and audiocassettes, printed material, and tutoring. Custom-designed programs include one targeted for 16 prison inmates and another that trains women older than 55 to be home health aides and child care workers. The average basic reading level improvement is 1.8 grade levels per 100 hours of training. Of the learners enrolled in the GED Preparation Program, 63 percent pass 1 to 5 subject area tests in a maximum of 100 hours of training. Ninety-three percent of learners pass subject area tests the first time they attempt them. The program's attrition rate is 16 percent. (CML)

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*  
\* from the original document. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

# BEGINNING WITH THE LEARNER: STRATEGIES TO INDIVIDUALIZE ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

R. Shepherd\*

## ABSTRACT

Instructional techniques necessary for the success of at-risk adult learners who find traditional methods of instruction inadequate, documented by research conducted by the Remediation and Training Institute, Washington, D.C., in 1983, are the basis for all computer-assisted instruction at the Continuing Education Learning Center. The Center, under the auspices of Jackson State University, includes individualized education plans in all programs: Basic Literacy, GED Preparation, Pre-employment Skills, Job Specific Skills and special programs to meet the needs of employed and unemployed adults. Special programs include those for prison inmates, adults over 55 years old, and women in transition. The success of each program depends on four essential strategies: Pretesting, Diagnosing, Prescribing, and Using Multiple Instructional Techniques.

## INTRODUCTION

Each learner is pretested for reading level for immediate placement. Skills assessments are made to diagnose specific weaknesses in content areas. Prescriptions are individualized according to learner needs. Multiple instructional techniques accommodate different learning styles and include interactive and personal computers, video and audio cassettes, textbook or manual assignments, one-to-one tutoring, small group discussions, and simulations. Tutorial computer software is carefully reviewed prior to inclusion in any program. Teachers (Learning Managers) are highly skilled and trained professionals committed to adult literacy.

Statistics underscore the success of computer assisted individualized learning plans.

## PRETESTING

For a learner to succeed, instruction must begin where the learner is. Before weaknesses are diagnosed and prescriptions written, it is essential to know the reading level of the learner. At the Continuing Education Learning Center, each learner completes an interest questionnaire and takes the Slosson Oral Reading Test for word recognition. This test is not designed for reading comprehension. That

\*Education Consultant for Curriculum Development, Jackson State University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.  
□ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

*R. Shepherd*  
*Shepherd's Inc.*

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

comes later. The SORT is used exclusively for immediate placement and to measure progress. (At the initial stage, tests for comprehension are too intimidating for most adults enrolled in literacy programs. These learners are at-risk learners with most of the characteristics of any at-risk learner. Their success must be very carefully programmed.)

Learners reading below the 5th grade level are placed in the Basic Program: the interactive Phonemic Alphabet Learning System developed by Dr. Henry Martin and marketed by IBM. Learners reading above 5th grade level are given skills tests to determine specific areas of strengths and weaknesses in reading, language skills and mathematics. Although some self-test software is available to identify these areas, the Center uses paper tests. At the pre-diagnostic stage, most at-risk learners are more comfortable with the directions for the familiar paper test.

#### DIAGNOSING

Diagnosis is determined by weaknesses identified by the skills tests and by answers on the interest questionnaire. Individualized education programs are designed to address content weaknesses which must be overcome if the learner is to succeed in the workforce or in a GED program.

Content weaknesses for workforce literacy include:

- o Vocabulary: Recognizing basic, common knowledge words and job specific words.
- o Thinking Skills: Literal comprehension, main ideas, cause and effect, and comparison and contrast.
- o Understanding What is Real: Basic--following directions, locating key words.
- o Understanding What is Real: Complex--inferences, paraphrasing.
- o Problem Solving.
- o Writing Skills: Recording, outlining, relevant details, summarizing.
- o Computational Skills: Whole numbers, fractions, decimals, percents, conversion measurements.
- o Charts and Diagrams.

Content weaknesses in the GED Program are diagnosed according to the five content areas: Reading, Writing, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics.

Learner interest in specific life skills content areas are also considered and included in the prescription.

## PRESCRIBING

A prescription for an individualized education program is designed for competency-based instruction to address content weaknesses. Examples of a typical prescription for computational and reading weaknesses follow:

|                    | PRETEST | ASSIGNMENTS       | POSTTEST | DATE OF COMPLETION |
|--------------------|---------|-------------------|----------|--------------------|
| <u>Mathematics</u> |         |                   |          |                    |
| Whole Numbers      |         |                   |          |                    |
| Addition           |         | Math Blaster      |          |                    |
| Subtraction        |         | Math Blaster      |          |                    |
| Decimals           |         | Queue Disk 2:1-5  |          |                    |
|                    |         | Queue Disk 3:9-10 |          |                    |
| <u>Reading</u>     |         |                   |          |                    |
| Supporting Details |         | Queue Disk 1:1-10 |          |                    |
|                    |         | Hartley: Synonyms |          |                    |
| Inferences         |         | Queue Disk 3:1-10 |          |                    |

Computer-assisted competency-based prescribed instruction allows learners to pace themselves and helps them be somewhat accountable for their own learning. It also provides for frequent feedback and re-cycling, and it accommodates several learning styles--all of which address the unique needs of at-risk adult learners.

## MULTIPLE INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES

To accommodate the learning styles of at-risk learners, the Center uses both interactive and personal computers, video and audio cassettes, print material, one-to-one tutoring by highly skilled and trained professionals committed to adult literacy. Tutorial computer software is carefully reviewed prior to inclusion in any program.

## CUSTOM DESIGNED INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Custom-designed programs include one targeted for 16 prison inmates transported to the Center under guard. Another program trains women over 55 to be home health aides and child care workers. A program begun in September, enrolls women who are heads of households who are potential college students but who do not have a high school diploma.

## RESULTS

Statistics underscore the success of computer assisted individualized learning plans: average basic reading level improvement is 1.8 grade levels per 100 hours of training; of the learners enrolled in the GED Preparation Program, 63% pass 1 to 5 subject-area tests in 100 hours of training or less; 93% pass subject-area tests the first time attempted; test scores average 5 points higher than required to pass; attrition rate is 16%. We have every reason to believe that computer-assisted individualized education programs are responsible for much of our success.